

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

BERNARD J. BANNON

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

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INTERVIEWEE: BERNARD BANNON

INTERVIEWER: NANCY FEHST

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Bernard Bannon for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Nancy Fehst at 1014 Black Road, Joliet, Illinois, on March 1, 1977 at 7:30 p.m.

FEHST: Would you like to start with your background -- of your childhood and where and when you were born?

BANNON: Well, Nancy, I was born at the corner of Jefferson and Nicholson Streets, April 5, 1903, and I lived there practically all my life till I was married, of course. The Bannon family, as you know, are a fairly large family. I happen to be the baby of ten, and we lived there most of the time. My dad was in the meat and grocery business for forty years at the old number 109 South Joliet Street, which the Joliet Municipal Building sets on a part of that -- covers that block.

FEHST: Could you tell me what schools you attended?

BANNON: Yes. I attended St. Patrick's Elementary School, or Grade School, and the Joliet Township High School. That's as far as my education goes. /Chuckle/

FEHST: Can you remember, when you were going to St. Patrick's, the type of classroom atmosphere? Now the schools in Joliet and other places are very modern; they have different ways of teaching.

BANNON: Well, in those days we had the Sisters which taught us. I think if I remember rightly that the Loretto nuns, later the Dominican Sisters came in and taught us the last couple of years in my schooling



at St. Patrick's. At that time St. Patrick's Church was right adjacent to the school. They were fairly large classrooms; of course, they were the old style. St. Patrick's was an old stone building, two-story, had the gymnasium or auditorium up on the second floor, and the school rooms were on the first floor and a couple of school rooms were on the first floor and a couple of school rooms were in the basement. Nothing like the modern schools are today.

FEHST: Do you remember any kind of different school supplies that you used at that time?

BANNON: Oh, that's hard to remember, Nancy. The books, of course, that we had were not furnished; they were bought by our parents. All of the school supplies were bought by our parents. We didn't have anything to do with furnishing of any school books or supplies of any kind.

FEHST: I thought this would be interesting: Can You remember the cost of the tuition at St. Patrick's at that time?

BANNON: I think it was a dollar a month.

FEHST: Oh, really! [clock chimes] [laughter] Oh, that's something!

BANNON: Yes, I think it was a dollar a month, and the maximum -- if there were many children in the school from the same family -- I think it was either two or three dollars a month maximum for everybody. Of course, the teachers were nuns who did not receive a salary; and, of course, they were dedicated people that just did it for the Order and for the benefit of the children.

FEHST: When you were in school -- there's such a stress on current





political events today in the school systems -- can you remember that being stressed -- any presidents or any kind of political topics being discussed in the school system or in your classrooms?

BANNON: No. As I recall it, at that time I don't recall of any political moves that were brought into the school. I do remember Al Smith when he ran for the presidency, that was in -- in 1928; and, of course, being a Catholic was not kosher as far as that would be concerned at the time. And I think religion had a lot to do with it, where today, why, I think we're all more broad-minded.

FEHST: Then you went on to Joliet Township. Do you remember what sort of curriculum was offered at Joliet Township at the time?

BANNON: Well, there were engineering courses; there were literature and arts. There was, oh gee, there was manual training courses. That's about all I can remember.

FEHST: Were you involved in any kind of outside, extra-curricular activities in high school?

BANNON: No. I'll tell you why. Because of our dad being in the meat and grocery business, we'd get out of school at twenty minutes to four and I was due to work in the store, and was due there at four o'clock, and I had better be there.

FEHST: Oh. [Laughter] Okay.

BANNON: So activities, as far as sports and so on, I didn't take any active part.

FEHST: When you were in high school, were there any particular hangouts





around the Joliet area -- that kids have? High school students always have one particular place where they go to.

BANNON: Well, my big hangout was the Great Northern Billiard Parlor which was at the corner of Jefferson and Chicago Streets, a basement. And that's where, when I had any time, that's where I congregated. And a brother-in-law of mine happened to run the Great Northern Billiard Parlor.

FEHST: What did they have there?

BANNON: Well, there was pool tables, billiard tables, and there was a barber shop in there also.

FEHST: Did you have to pay to play pool?

BANNON: Oh, yes.

FEHST: Do you remember how much?

BANNON: The cost at that time was sixty cents an hour, which is very nominal compared to what it is today.

FEHST: Oh, I'm sure it is.

BANNON: All right, if you played pool, it was usually ten cents a cue, ten cents a cue per game. Maybe the game would take ten minutes; it would run something like that.

FEHST: When you would go to a place like this, if you got any Coke, maybe, or any kind of thing to eat at a place like that, can you remember how much a Coke would cost, or . . . ?



BANNON: Coca-Cola, and of course 7-Up wasn't involved at that time, but the Coca-Cola would cost you a nickel.

FEHST: Would there be anything else that you would have?

BANNON: No. You could buy a cup of coffee or a sandwich down there; and of course, there were cigars.

FEHST: When you were at Joliet Township -- this last question that I wanted to ask you about that was: What measures of discipline were taken at that time?

BANNON: Well, if you skipped school or you did something that you were not supposed to do, you went before the principal and the superintendent, or the superintendent, and depending upon your, the degree of the act that you did, you were given days after school in Room 34, which meant that you were -- you'd get all the way from ten days to sixty days that after school you'd have to go into that room and stay there until 4:30, from twenty minutes till four to put in the time involved so that was one of the ways of discipling.

FEHST: Can you remember any specific incidents that happened to you?

BANNON: Oh, I was in there a couple of times! /Laughter/ Then, of course, you see, I got it at school and then I got it when I got home -- because I was due at the store at four o'clock. So under the conditions, why I was due to get a double dose of it when I got home, cause of the fact that I did something that wasn't supposed to be, but all in all, it wasn't too bad.

FEHST: Oh, that's interesting! I was curious about that, about what



they did at that time, you know, how they disciplined. At that time, what were the different types of transportation that was used, getting to work, or getting to school? .

BANNON: Well, at that time, there was the streetcars, but we walked from what is now Central High to the middle of the second hill on Jefferson Street. We had two lunch periods which consisted of thirty-five minutes each, so you had seventy minutes to walk from the corner of Jefferson and Eastern to Jefferson and Nicholson, get your lunch, and turn around and go on back, and walk both ways -- or run part of the time. [Laughter]

FEHST: Then you would walk to school. If you had to go anywhere for a really long distance, you'd take the streetcar?

BANNON: The streetcar, or the family car. We had a car at that time. We could on special occasions, why we could use it, but we were never allowed to take it to school.

FEHST: What kind of car was it?

BANNON: It was a 1917 Buick seven-passenger touring car, with a winter enclosure on it, and we also had side curtains, but this was a solid winter enclosure that you could -- close in -- with sliding windows on it so that you could just open it part way.

FEHST: Oh, was that considered at that time a luxury?

BANNON: Oh, that was a luxury, that's right.

FEHST: Did many families that you had gone to school with, from the same parish, have cars?





BANNON: Well, not too many. There were very few cars that were driven over there. Once in a while you'd find someone that would drive over, but not as a regular, no.

FEHST: And I asked you if there were any hangouts when you were in high school. But if you were to go on a date, when you were in high school, were there any kinds of entertainment that were available in the downtown area or any other place?

BANNON: Yes, well, we used to have, when we started going out on dates, we used to go to the Orpheum Theater and we had our regular tickets, reserved seats, for the nine o'clock show and we had them every Sunday evening -- at nine o'clock. But we had to pick up the tickets on a Sunday morning so as to be sure that -- they wouldn't keep them after noon on Sunday -- they'd sell them to somebody else. So we used to go down there on Sunday morning and pick up our tickets so that we'd be ready for the nine o'clock show.

FEHST: Can you remember how much it would be to have a season ticket?

BANNON: Well, it cost you by the week. You paid every week when you picked up your tickets. They would reserve them for you, but you had to pay for them every week. Gee, I don't remember the cost -- maybe fifty cents per person. And they usually had five acts of vaudeville.

FEHST: Oh, I don't know too much about vaudeville. That was live performers?

BANNON: Yes, they would show a newsreel and then they would show -- after the newsreel, they would show the vaudeville acts. And they usually had five of them. Oh, Jack Benny had been here. Oh, and what





are some of the other actors and actresses? There were quite a few. I can't think about them now, just who they were, but I remember Jack Benny being on the stage. When they played Joliet and got a hand -- if they got a hand in Joliet, they figured they were good because this was a tough audience to meet in Joliet from what I understand.

FEHST: If people were disliked -- different performers were disliked in Joliet -- what kind of treatment would they get?

BANNON: Well, they might get a lot of booing. That was all, or they wouldn't get the applause that they normally would expect. If you got applause in Joliet, you were pretty good.

FEHST: That's curious. I was thinking that the Orpheum Theater was for movies. Were there any places for movies around here?

BANNON: Oh yes, there was the Princess, the old Auditorium. That was at the corner of Clinton and Chicago Streets. And, of course, the Rialto was built later, and the Mode came in later, too. Back in the early days it was the Orpheum and the Auditorium Theater.

FEHST: Now you said before you were in high school that you were working for your father's meat and grocery business. And where did you say it was located?

BANNON: It was 109 S. Joliet Street. They used to number from Jefferson at the time and it was at the corner of the alley, just a half of block south of Jefferson Street on Joliet.

FEHST: Okay, and when you would help your father with his business, you said you had to be there at four o'clock. What was your job when you



would go in there and help him?

BANNON: Well, I would have to put up orders, and I would have to clean the store, help clean the store, put up potatoes, put up sugar, in two-, five-, and ten-pound bags, potatoes up in peck-size bags, fifteen pounds to the peck, and that was about it -- deliver. And on Saturdays we always had an extra horse and wagon from the livery stable, and at that time my dad was doing some advertising in the paper and we were taking orders Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. And then there were two horse and wagons going out delivering the groceries.

FEHST: So that's how you would publicize your grocery store -- you put it in the paper?

BANNON: Well, we would run an ad in the paper of specials, you know -- the same as they do today in the supermarkets, although it was maybe a little different scale than it is now. Of course, you didn't have a check-out counter and we had an old-style cash register and so on.

FEHST: How was the cash register? It probably didn't have . . .

BANNON: It wasn't an electric type; it was a push button type that you rang up so many dollars and so many cents all in one, or if there wasn't enough on the cash register, you maybe would have to ring up -- if it was ten dollars, maybe you would have to ring up three times three would be nine, and then ring up a dollar and a quarter to bring it up to the ten-twenty-five, whatever it might be. So that was the way it was in the old days.

FEHST: Oh, do you remember any other grocery stores around there that ever gave your father any competition?



BANNON: Yes, there was Schreiner's Grocery on Jefferson. There was Shinner's Meat Market; there was Kiep's on North Chicago Street. And just before Dad closed out of business, there was a Consumers Grocery that went in at the corner of Jefferson and Joliet Streets. And that was when Dad decided to get out of the grocery business because they were selling articles cheaper than he could buy them. I think I told you that before.

FEHST: Yes. Did you remember Mahoney's Grocery Store? That's one of the things I saw in the book that you gave me.

BANNON: Yes, that was at the corner of Chicago and Cass Streets. And the Kline's is on that property at the present time. Mahoney's leased the ground to the L.F. Beach Company. Beach's built a dry goods store and they went broke. And finally Goldblatt's took the store over and Goldblatt's operated for a long time and then Kline's came into the picture when Goldblatt's moved out to the Hillcrest Shopping Center. You can probably remember that, Nancy.

FEHST: I remember the Goldblatt's out there.

BANNON: Uh-huh, but they were at the corner of Chicago and Cass Streets.

FEHST: Yes. Can you describe sort of what your grocery store looked like?

BANNON: Well, it was a long, narrow store. We had groceries stacked in sort of an island where you would -- oh, maybe the island would be six feet in depth and there would be tiers on it so that you could reach to the rear tier, or you had a clamp arrangement that you would -- that if you wanted a can of something that was on the top shelf, why then you could reach over and pick it up with this clamp and take it off of there.





It wasn't self-service like the present grocery stores and on the opposite side was, oh, a cigar case and counter for teas and coffees and so on. Then we kept sugar in barrels. We would weigh out the different sized packages as they wanted it, and we also had cornmeal in a barrel that we dished out two, five pounds, whatever they wanted. And then there was a meat counter, and there were three butcher blocks where all the meat was cut to order. We didn't have a display case where we cut the meat and put it in the display case. We cut it as people ordered it, or as people came in to get it.

FEHST: Was there a certain quota of meat that people could buy or -- there's so much shortage now of different things . . . ?

BANNON: No, the only time I can remember is during the war, World War I, when sugar was very short and we were limited to selling a maximum of two pounds per customer. That's the only thing I remember that we were short of.

FEHST: Can you remember any prices of some of the items that you would sell in your grocery store?

BANNON: Gee, that's pretty hard to remember. I think I can remember pork chops selling for two pounds for a quarter. I can remember porterhouse steak selling for about twenty-five cents a pound. And I would think that the same would go for veal chops, lamb chops. We had an old style refrigerator, or an icebox, walk-in cooler, and they would hold about a ton of ice. That was put in from the rear and then there was a grating between, and then we had hooks, of course, to hang the meat on. We also had a great big crock in the refrigerator that my dad made his own corned beef. He mixed the brine and put the corned beef in





there and usually let it stand for two weeks before it would be ready to be sold at the market.

FEHST: I know one of the ways that you said the grocery store business was personalized was by delivery, of course, which you don't see now. Were there any other ways it was personalized, because it seems that's one of the advantages of the neighborhood store?

BANNON: Well, the thing about it was you had your regular customers and they would call in most every day because they didn't have the refrigeration. They would call in every day and get whatever they wanted, either that or they would come into the market and pick up what they wanted. They didn't have the refrigeration that they could carry meat and keep it fresh like they do now with your electric refrigerators and freezers and so on. I know for years my dad kept open on Sunday morning from 6:30 in the morning till 12:30 at noon just so the farmer could come in and get his meat. He would come into church and then he would get his meat and go on home with it, where today why they come in most any time and buy a hundred dollars worth of meat and groceries and take the meat home and put it in the freezer . . .

FEHST: And save it.

BANNON: Those days we didn't have those things.

FEHST: You know, since you're from a Catholic family, was there any -- it seems like -- it occurs more today than it did at that time -- to be open on a Sunday. Were there any conflicts about....?

BANNON: No, no question about it at that time because it was a matter of preservation of the food. It was a must and there was never a question



as to being open on Sunday because of that fact.

FEHST: Because now stores are open on Sundays.

BANNON: Yes, that's right. There was a time, oh just a few years back where there was a move out to boycott Sunday shopping, but not anymore. Everybody -- now they want to stay open twenty-four hours a day.

FEHST: When your store was where the Joliet Municipal Building is now -- at that time, can you remember any of the other stores, or buildings close to your father's? You named a couple of grocery stores, but are there any other . . . ?

BANNON: Yes, there was a Galaś's Restaurant three or four doors south of dad's store, and then next to that there was a Hauser's Boarding House for people that used to live there and board, right at the boarding house. Then there was the Fritz Sausage Company, Fred H. Fritz Sausage Company, down in the next block. There was Cutty's Restaurant right across the street from my dad. And, oh, there was horseshoe shops and blacksmith shops where they would come in and get their horses shod. There used to be, years ago, they used to have a Horse Fair Day every month and it was on Washington Street just a half block south of my dad's store, and they'd line up horses along the curb from Des Plaines Street to Ottawa Street, and people would come in on this particular day and they would -- anybody that was in the market, they would buy a horse or sell a horse -- they had them there.

FEHST: Can you remember -- horses -- it seems like they are so expensive now -- can you remember how much a horse would go for at that time?



BANNON: Oh, it's hard to tell, Nancy. At that time I remember that, well, I think the average horse would sell for maybe seventy-five to a hundred dollars. But I think you could buy some cheaper and some more expensive. It all depended upon how old the horse was, the condition it was, of course, because horses had trouble, just the same as people. They had bad legs or they had -- or they were short of wind, and they tried them out to see how they were, and a man that came in to buy a horse -- there was usually enough there for him to pick from.

FEHST: And then the horses were used for what kinds of work?

BANNON: Oh, they were used for all types of work. They would use them for delivery, they would use them for heavy draying, you know when there were heavy things to haul. Farmers would come in and buy horses or sell horses to be on the farm for plowing and all of the work that is done by tractors now. All that used to be done all by horses.

FEHST: When you got out of high school, this was probably about the time of World War I, when it got started -- how old were you when you were graduated from high school?

BANNON: Oh, I have to stop and think now. I was eighteen.

FEHST: Do you remember, did it have an impact, was World War I a traumatic thing for you and your family at that time?

BANNON: Well, I was just -- I just missed the draft in World War I.. I was just a little bit too young. And then, of course, I was just a little bit too old for, and I drew a low number for, World War II, so I was right in that in-between.





FEHST: Did you have any relatives in World War I, or anybody that you knew that was in the war?

BANNON: Well, there was none of our family in the war; my brother John was never in, and my older brother, he wasn't in it either. There were none of our family in the war.

FEHST: Can you remember at that time, the attitude towards German-Americans in Joliet?

BANNON: Well, I don't recall too much, Nancy, as to what was the -- there didn't seem to be too much resentment of the Germans at that time -- that is, the people that I came in contact with anyway.

FEHST: I've often heard that in maybe some different cities that there was a lot of resentment.

BANNON: If there was, I don't recall it.

FEHST: Then your second job, when you graduated from high school, you worked for J.B. McCarthy Paving Contractors?

BANNON: Yes.

FEHST: Can you remember any particular street that you paved at that time?

BANNON: Well, they were in the paving business and there was Jefferson Street, Hunter Avenue, Illinois Street, part of Wilcox around the cemetery, then we went to Villa Park. We paved practically every street in Villa Park. And I can't tell you just exactly the number of streets that I worked on, but I worked on several of them.





FEHST: Do you remember the types of machinery that you used to pave these?

BANNON: Well, yes. Of course, there was a regular concrete mixer; and the trucks hauled the stone, sand, and cement and dumped it into the mixer. And I drove one of those trucks for a couple of years. Maybe one day we'd haul stone and the next day we'd haul sand and cement, depending on what the situation was, how they were working it out. Then the concrete mixer was on a "cat" track so that it would move up maybe five, six feet at a time, and then there was a chute out the back where there were men. Leveling the concrete was all done by hand, and there weren't any machines at that time to level it off. There were Barber-Green loaders, a large truck, maybe a five-ton truck would bring six, seven tons of stone, dump it along the road, and then these Barber-Green loaders would load the stone and sand into the hopper and then the trucks would back under that hopper and they would pull a lever and that would allow just that hopperful to go in, and that would be counted as what they called a "batch", and then after that, the truck that was hauling sand would go to a platform where there was bags of cement piled on there, and there would be maybe six or seven men there that would dump the bags of cement into the truck, and then we would drive over to the cement mixer and dump it in there.

FEHST: It sounds like it was so much manual labor.

BANNON: Oh, yes, at that time there wasn't the machinery that they've got today.

FEHST: About how long did it take to pave one street: I know it's hard to say. It depended upon how long and how wide the street was, but . . .



BANNON: Well, I can't remember exactly, but I would say probably it would take you at least two days to put a block of concrete in because of the time and so much that would have to be hauled in and all done by hand, you know.

FEHST: Do you remember any certain difficulties you had when you paved the streets, like streetcars? Did that cause any problems when you'd be paving the streets?

BANNON: No, this I think was after the time of the streetcars. Especially Jefferson Street and some of the other side streets that we paved, of course, didn't have streetcars on them, but we would pave one side and then go back and pave the other side so that you could stay within your -- so that you wouldn't interfere with the tracks, and with people getting on. Why they just wouldn't be able to get on and off at that particular place where we would be paving, because they couldn't walk in wet concrete. [Laughter]

FEHST: Do you remember what your wages were at that time, working for J.B. McCarthy?

BANNON: Yes. I worked for \$35 a week.

FEHST: Really! Boy! And that was hard labor!

BANNON: And the last year that I was with them, they rented three five-ton White trucks from a man in Cleveland, Ohio, and I got a promotion and I was raised to \$45 a week when I started driving a big truck.



FEHST: Were you married at that time?

BANNON: No.

FEHST: When you had that job, you went through the twenties. So you went through the crazy twenties that you hear so much about? Can you remember at that time, did Prohibition affect you any? I don't know -- maybe people that didn't drink, it didn't effect them at all, but . . .

BANNON: Well, of course, I remember the days of the Speakeasies and the home brews, but it didn't effect me too much because I was never a drinker.

FEHST: Do you remember any place around here where you could get liquor? I'm sure there were some places.

BANNON: Oh, yes, there were a few places that you could -- I remember one place on South Chicago Street that you could go in and there was a double door. You went in and there was a little peep hole that they'd look out to see who you were before they would allow you to come in.

FEHST: That sounds just like in the movies.

BANNON: [Laughter] No, that didn't effect me too much because I never was very much of a drinker.

FEHST: Can you remember the name of that store or that Speakeasy?

BANNON: Gee, I don't, Nancy, I know that it was just south of Osgood Street on S. Chicago, the east side of the street, but I don't remember who operated it. Then there were other taverns that were open that were pretty much "open and above board", too, because, well, they seemed





to go along and maybe for a month or two, they'd be arrested; they'd pay their fine, and they would be right back open again.

FEHST: People who were the owners of the place that permitted liquor to be served got caught, but was there any such thing as the people who were being served getting caught for violating Prohibition?

BANNON: Not to my knowledge. I have no memory on that at all.

FEHST: Okay. Do you remember, was there any kind of marathon dances at that time around here?

BANNON: Well, I think there were in Chicago. Not so many around here. The dance halls that I remember in my time were Lake Renwick, and Electric Park in Plainfield, which every Saturday night, I think, they danced at Renwick. Electric Park was a little older, and they had an old pavillion -- we danced many, many times. Fact of the matter is, they used to dance Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. They had the orchestra out there and Harriet Sweet's Orchestra used to play out there much of the time. And later I think the old pavillion burned, and then they made over the auditorium and they had larger crowds over there and they advertised bands and they would advertise and they would come out there but I don't recall -- Benny Goodman, I think, was one of them that used to come out.

FEHST: Really!

BANNON: And I can't think of some of the others.

FEHST: Did people really do crazy things like flag-pole sitting, or well, that was the time of the flappers -- do you remember how women dressed then? Were there really flappers or was that just certain chosen, certain few, people? Do you remember flappers or anything like that?



BANNON: No, I don't recall that. I remember the gals that used to wear long dresses with a lot of lace on them and so on, but nothing that I can talk about.

FEHST: Now in the twenties -- the modes of transportation -- were there more automobiles at that time?

BANNON: Oh, yes. They kept getting more and more and more automobiles.

FEHST: What happened to the horses and the horse-drawn carriages?

BANNON: Well, see, the horses especially for hauling, heavy hauling, that moved into the truck area, era, and horses kept finally going out. They weren't needed like they were back in the old days.

FEHST: Then you went on to International Harvester. That was your third job? Okay, you worked there -- what were the years that you were selling for them?

BANNON: Yes, I started to work for Harvester as a motor truck salesman in 1927 and I worked with them as a motor truck salesman until 1932 or '33. I don't remember which. I think '32. They had a sub-branch here in Joliet. They closed that and then I went to work for Mr. John Ohla of the Ohla Motor Company who had the Chrysler-Plymouth Agency and he took out a franchise for International Harvester Motor Trucks and asked me if I would go with them and take charge of the truck end of the business. I worked with Mr. Ohla until 1935 and then I took the agency myself.

FEHST: Through the years can you remember when you first started working for International Harvester? I know they sell farm implements, trucks,



motor trucks, and everything, but what other kinds of items did you sell?

BANNON: That was the only thing that I sold from 1927 to 1932 or '33.

I just sold motor trucks. Then of course, when I took on the franchise myself from 1935 to 1944, that's all I sold was just International Harvester Motor trucks -- that's all.

FEHST: Do you remember at that time what would be the cost of a motor truck when you would sell it?

BANNON: Well, I think a pick-up truck would run about \$750 up to the larger trucks. We didn't have too many what they call "six-wheelers" -- until later-- later years -- but probably the largest four-wheel truck that I have ever sold would probably run about \$7,000 to \$8,000.

FEHST: Oh, really! Is that expensive at that time?

BANNON: Oh, it was very expensive at that time. Now they'll sell for about \$25,000 to \$30,000. Quite a difference. [Laughter]

FEHST: Can you see a lot of comparisons between a tractor or the motor truck at that time, in comparison with now. How is it?

BANNON: Well, yes, there's quite a difference. When I first started selling trucks, I was selling the hard-tired truck; it wasn't the pneumatic tire that you put air in, it was just a solid tire, solid rubber and the speed trucks came into their own about 1928. That was shortly after I started to work for the company, and then when they got into speed, you got into -- you had to get into pneumatic tires, which would allow you to travel faster. Back in the old days with the solid tire trucks, the maximum was about 17 mph. But as trucks developed and they made them so







that they would travel faster, they had to get into a high speed pneumatic tire in order to be able to do it.

FEHST: At this time I know you said you only sold motor trucks but you didn't sell any tractors -- were those being sold at the time?

BANNON: Oh, yes.

FEHST: With these farm implements do you remember what ever happened to the small farmer who only had sixty acres?

BANNON: Well, the small farmer can't exist. It used to be that if a person had sixty acres they could raise a family and live very well. Today if they're not farming a thousand acres why they can't make it. Of course, there's a lot of things to take into consideration, too, because the farmer now has got machinery so that he'll work during the spring, and fall. He works in the spring and fall, and in the summer and winter why he'll have a job on the side that he's working maybe at Caterpillar or some place else to fill in while he's -- but the machinery can do so much work now, we used to think if we sold a two-bottom, fourteen-inch plow, why it was a fair sized plow, but now they use gangs of six and eight plows, and they'll take a great big tractor to pull those and they'll do so much more work now, that the average farmer just wouldn't -- if he had to do it with the old machinery, he would never get it done.

FEHST: It would probably take forever. Do you remember at that time when you'd need gas to run some of this machinery --do you remember what it cost about that time?

BANNON: Oh, gas, including all taxes, wouldn't run over twenty cents a



gallon.

FEHST: Oh, really! Oh boy! Things have changed.

BANNON: Yes, thing's have changed.

FEHST: They really have. When you started selling for International Harvester, you started two years before the Depression. How did this effect you and your family at the time? How did it effect your finances, just your living at that time?

BANNON: Well, twenty-five dollars a week was a pretty good deal during the Depression. You could get a loan on that, but as far as the Depression is concerned, we always got by, we didn't run into debt very much, but there were many people who had problems.

FEHST: You often hear about how many people committed suicide at that time and I was just wondering -- can you remember the morale?

BANNON: Well, I think those people that committed suicide were a lot of people that had a lot of money and they lost it in the stock-market, in the crash, and they just weren't able to take it. But when a poor guy like me went along and didn't have anything to start with, I had nothing to lose, Nancy. [Laughter]

FEHST: So at that time then you just kind of got along. It didn't really . . .

BANNON: We lived from day to day and you just couldn't save anything, you were just fortunate to -- I remember of -- oh, probably, I got into a bit of a debt but not to speak of. I tried to stay and live within my means.



FEHST: Were many people at that time out of jobs?

BANNON: Well, at that time I think there was a lot of WPA work that if a person wasn't getting along, they didn't hand it out like they do now. The people wanted to work for it and they had sewer and water projects around and parks that people were doing government work and paid by the government just for a mere existence. No, it was rough, but we seemed to survive it.

FEHST: I remember hearing that teachers at that time were paid but the schools could not endorse their checks financially. I was wondering if that's the same with other professions? They would give them checks but they had no money to redeem them.

BANNON: Well, there was a time that they put out script instead of money, but the banks and stores would take it. Mrs. Bannon, after we were married, substituted for a take home pay of three dollars a day. So, Nancy, I'm sure that you'll do better than that. [Laughter] You hope you will anyway.

FEHST: Was it in 1935 that you went into business for yourself for the motor trucks -- International Harvester? Where was your building located?

BANNON: I started on South Chicago Street in the old Whalen Building. I stayed there for about a year and a half and then I came up and bought the building that is now occupied by Illinois Bell Telephone Company, which I have a lease with them, and this was right across from Al Baskin's parking lot on Joliet Street. But that was in the interim between 1935 and 1937 -- I think I bought the building, until 1944 when I took on the farm machinery line.





FEHST: Since you moved down there, can you remember a lot of changes that have taken place -- you were going to school at Joliet Township. When you used to go to school at Joliet Township, when you were in high school, do you remember the changes that had taken place in the downtown area from that time to when you bought your building?

BANNON: Well, in the downtown area, there hasn't been too much new that's been built, Nancy; I think the Rialto Building was built in 1929, no wait a minute -- no '25. Gee, I don't know of any new buildings outside of the Courthouse and the Municipal Building. I think Grant's built a new building there on the corner that is now vacant, that's across from -- oh, let's see -- on the southwest corner of Clinton and Chicago Streets. But gee, there's no new buildings in Joliet. It's pretty much the same.

FEHST: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Bannon. I really appreciate this.

BANNON: Did that cover it pretty well?

FEHST: Yes, that does. It was really interesting.



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